Frank S. Stephens

Field Notes

1907

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April 16 1907.

On our way from Juneau to Windfall Harbor we saw several whales. They came up to blow about once in two minutes. The spout was high, straight and distinct. The largest of the three curved its back higher than the others as it went under after blowing. The dorsal fin was straight on the front edge and distinctly incurved on the back edge. It was situated well back, but as I did not see the flukes I can't say what the proportions were. Probably these were Oregon Finback Whales.

20th. Windfall Harbor, Alaska

A female Pine Siskin (Spinus pinus) shot today had already incubated. Sisking are rather common here, perhaps the most abundant land bird. There are not many species of birds about, and some of these are represented by very few individuals. Siskins seem to feed somewhat along the beach, but their crops are full of something white that looks like finely broken pine seeds.

April 21st. Windfall Harbor,

Saw a siskin fly out from the beach a short distance, followed by a small scotty brown hawk. The siskin dodged about and the hawk soon gave up and went back into the timber. It was probably the Black Merlin. (Falco columbarius suckleyi).

I saw a pair of birds that I think were Crossbills. One was brownish gray and the other looked like the immature saffron-colored plumage.

Mammals are few, and so far comprise Sitka White-footed Mice. (Peromyscus sitkensis) Sitka Meadow Mice (Microtus sitkensis) and a Deer that Miss Alexander saw. I saw tracks of one Mink (Lutreola)

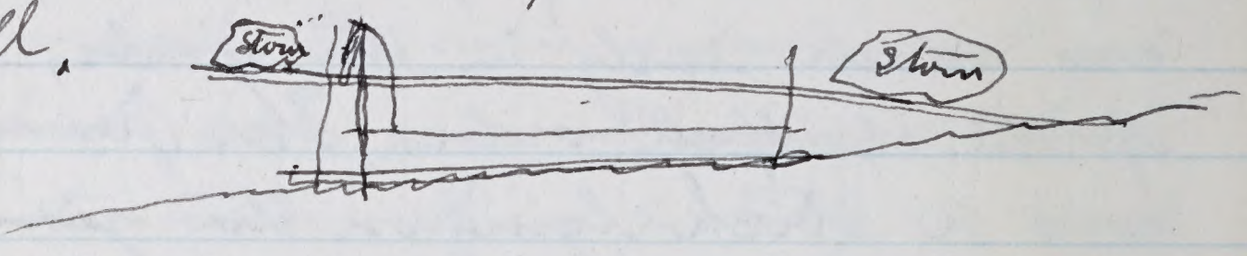
23rd.

Saw a Varied Thrush (Ixoreus naevius) carrying nest material.

Saw the first Butterfly. It was on the ~~beach~~ beach, about noon, and flew up into a big spruce. The species is new to me.

24th, In setting my traps I came across a trap made by Indians, It was set and ready for use, It probably was made early in the winter, It was of the deadfall order, The foundation was a stick lying on the ground, A pair of stakes was driven at one end, on either side, A pole was hung over the foundation stick, and parallel with it, and weighted with a stone at either end, This deadfall pole was about nine inches above the other, One end rested on the ground and the other was hung in a loop of cord, This cord ~~band~~ was looped over the short end of a trigger lever, which rested over the wedge shaped end of one of the stakes, This trigger was a crooked twig, The lower end pressed against a small twig that rested horizontally against the stakes between the two poles and one third of the way above the foundation pole, It was held in place only by the pressure against it of the trigger, A mink in

passing would knock this twig down; this would release the trigger and the deadfall pole would then fall.




A female Sooty Grouse that I shot this afternoon had her crop full of fir or spruce leaves. She was very tame. The male Sooty Grouse are hooting in all directions. They must be quite common. I am unable to locate them by the sound. They seem to be quite unsuspicious.

26th. Saw a butterfly this forenoon. It was probably the one seen the 23rd. I got close to it and think it was a Vanessa milberti.

28th. Shot two Sandwich Sparrows (Ammodramus sandwichensis) this morning. They were in alder trees along the beach.

29th. Flushed a sooty grouse from where it was dusting itself at the upturned root of a tree. It was almost within reach, and flew up into the nearest spruce, from which I tumbled it by a shot from the "auk".

April 30, The Indians brought a fawn today, which they had taken from the body of the mother, It would have been born in two or three weeks probably,
Saw a kingfisher today.
May 1st. Saw a large starfish wrapped around a clam, apparently feeding on the flesh of the clam, This perhaps explains the presence on the beach of so many dead clam shells &c,
May 2 Saw one or more bats last evening, probably some species of Myotis. It kept so close to the trees and came so little into the open that we could not shoot it, The usual notes of the sooty grouse are five or six in number, uttered at intervals of less than a second, The fourth note is usually broken in two, or one may say that the fourth and fifth notes are short and uttered in about the usual time of one regular note, The hooting I suppose is all done by the males, all the birds we have traced up and shot by listening for the "hoots" have been

males. At daybreak all the grouse in the country seem to begin hooting, and after camp it sounds almost like a barnyard from the frequency of the notes. I am unable to locate a bird in a tree by its hooting, as I am deaf in one ear, and cannot be sure of the direction of the sound, which has a centrilogual quality.

A male red-backed hummingbird came around this afternoon. He seemed hungry and was looking for flowers, Apparently red was his favorite color, as he investigated everything red about camp; such as a red bordered towel, the red plates on the lithographed end of a canned fruit case, an empty salmon can, and particularly a red bandana handkerchief hanging on a bush. This he went to three times. He came within arms reach of me several times. His gorget was very brilliant.

3rd, A female shrew (Sorex ss?) taken last night contained five fœtuses, I can make out but four mammæ, ?, all inguinal. Microtus skinned yesterday and today had little white bunches on the inside of the skin, apparently groups of some parasitic larvæ; one skinned the 1st. had two wood ticks sticking on its face.

The feet of the ~~second~~ bear skin Miss Alexander bought were not skinned out. The hind foot measured 325 mm by .140 wide, and the fore foot was 140 wide. There was very little fat on this skin, but the one bought first had a considerable fat on it. So these bears do not always get thin in hibernating.

May 7, Two woodpeckers (Sphyrapicus ~~varius~~ nuchalis and Dryobates villosus harrisi) killed yesterday and skinned today were laying. "Jackson" killed a small bear day before yesterday.

May 8, A female buffle-head duck (Charitonetta albeola) killed this morning had shrimps in her gizzard. Her mate was swimming around her, and fluttering his wings to

make himself agreable. Another male of the same specie was performing somewhat the same way, ~~and~~ at a distance, with two females in his company, as if he had not yet made a choice. Most of the Canada geese have been paired some time. Some of the ducks are also paired but many are not, or at least have not divided up in pairs. Shot a golden pileolated warbler this morning. Dittijohn saw one three or four days ago.

May 10th, Saw a chestnut-backed Chickadee with an insect in its mouth this morning. It acted as if it was taking it to a brood of young chickadees. A few minutes later I saw a flock of half a dozen or so, so they cannot all be breeding yet. In the afternoon Dixon and I got after a pair of Marbled Guillemots. I thought they were a pair of small grebes, as I had never seen the guillemots in the water before. I shot at them several times with the .22 rifle. They would not fly, but dove. They staid under water a long time. I killed the male at last but the female eluded us.

Saturday

May 20th, Mouth Harbor, Isle Royale, Lake Superior.

Yesterday and I went inland four or five miles, southwest, from the bay, just to see the beaver meadows at the foot of the big mountain. These meadows occupy the site of an old lake, now filled with soil. The beaver was trapped out by Indians two years ago, but formerly they must have been quite a colony. We saw two houses, the oldest one was on the bank of the creek in one of the ponds. It had been a very large house, but is now but a mound of poles 15 feet or more across and 4 feet high. The other was built later, it stands back from the creek 100 feet or more, a small brook came in to the creek from one side, and the house was built over this many some stomach was. The channel was dug out to the creek and the entrance furrow was dug straight under the roots of one of the trees. This house was 20 to 25 feet across the base and five feet high. It was built of pulled poles and sticks dragged across from the creek. The interstices between the poles were filled with soil,

From his house was an old dam, enclosing perhaps half an acre, Several small brooks come down from the hill on the N. E. side of the meadow, and the dam impounded the water from these. It started at the foot of the hill, curved around back to the hillside again, being the segment of a circle. The top of the dam was level, but the ground being a little uneven the height was two to three feet. It was a very old dam, and must have been built principally of soil, as trees are scarcely and sticks visible now, and the top is still even. It looks like a farmers irrigating "levee". The sediment has filled the dam to within a foot of its top. A narrow break gives outlet to the brooks, and at one side is still a frame. At the lower end of the meadows a dam had been built across the creek. The creek is 10 to 15 feet wide and is too deep in the meadows to ford with rubber boots, but lower I waded it on the riffles. This dam now extends about half way across the stream, the remainder

having been washed away, the bank left is now a confused mass of poles and sticks, At a number of places along the bank of the creek in the meadow are evidences of old beavers principally when bends of the creek touched the hillsides, The mouths of these beavers have mostly fallen in and show as little bays of the creek side, The timber cut was mostly willow, alder and huckleberry, but a few small hemlock trees had been felled and fueled when it fell,

Mr. Hasselborg caught a beaver near Pleasant Bay a few days ago and brought it to us in the flesh, and Dixon has it stuffed, It is very much the darkest beaver I ever saw, and seems to have a short tail in proportion to its length,

We saw some yellow cedar and also a pine that Hasselborg calls "Jack Pine", It is similar to Pinus contorta of the Sierra Nevada in appearance, but the cones appear to me to be smaller, There were some willows in the meadow, They were in bloom, The alt. of the meadow must be only 700 to 800 ft,

May 31st, Caught a young Oregon Junco just out of the nest in a "pee-wee" trap, This is very early for this region. Neah Harbor, June 1st, Shot a Robin, It was with two others and seemed to be a migrant. Have noticed no others near this camp,

June 2, A porpoise brought by fishermen appears to be a Phocæna, but not communis, I found it was a female, but did not dissect. Its length was 1740 m.m.; pectoral fin 210; dorsal fin 170; breadth of caudal 415; I photographed it, Littlejohn saved the skull

June 3, Came in yesterday from a four days trip to the lakes, Some considerable beaver work, Dams were very frequent in some of the small streams, often raising the water so that it reached the next dam above, Some of the dams were quite old, I saw some embankments overgrown with trees, that were washed away at the stream so that the pond was dried, Other old dams that appeared to be uninhabited were still kept in repair, Probably these were used by one or more beavers in winter, who went elsewhere in summer, We saw fresh cuttings in many places along the lake beaches,

In these places a beaver appeared to have made a temporary home under the roots of some large tree, but the lake beaches would not answer for winter homes on account of the moving ice, which in storms would displace any stored wood. In the small streams the beavers made some dams that did not seem to be capable of economic use, — as if they were made for practice or amusement. The dams were made principally of alder poles and sticks. The soil is dug out above the dam and placed on the upstream side of the dam. Some of the old dams appeared as if made almost altogether of soil, but probably the sticks were rotted away on the outside. Usually the ponds were deepened to about 3 or 3½ feet all over. There were not many houses. Probably many more beavers live in burrows in the banks than live in houses. The trappers call these "bank beavers", and some think that they are either bachelors or a different kind of beaver. I see no reason for believing that they differ in any way. I think it is merely a matter of convenience and locality.

I have found beaver living in Kansas and also in the lower Colorado River, In neither of these places do they build houses. The banks are soft and burrows are easily dug. In Colorado I found houses, but the locality was very rocky and burrows would be difficult to dig, Around these lakes, houses seem to be of two classes, In one case the houses are in low land that did not rise sufficiently above the permanent water level to give room for safe burrows, so houses were built to cover dug sloping gravities, In the other case partial houses were built against banks of rocky ground when the beavers could not burrow deep enough to be safe, and the entrance of most burrows was covered by large or smaller stick piles, One or two of this last type of house was on this lake shore, and one is just within the rapids at the outlet of Hasselborg Lake where the water could not freeze over, and beavers could get to the dry land all winter, The dams were usually very irregular in shape, as if they were invoked about to take advantage of any local help in the way of mounds or trees,

In some cases canal like ditches were dug to carry small outside streams into the ~~dams~~ ponds when otherwise the water would pass by. I saw one that was 150 or 200 feet long, nearly straight, and that caught two other small streams on the way, dams being built in these on the lower side of the ditch. This was really the most intelligent piece of work that I saw, as it showed reasoning power. It probably was done in the dry season when water for the pond became scarce in the stream that supplied it. Trails leading from one set of ponds to another, or from ponds to lake were frequently used, and the beaver seem to visit about among their neighbors. Those that I saw showed considerable curiosity. They have been disturbed so little that they are not shy, and are abroad more or less of the day, but a very little hunting seemed to make them shy. These beaver eat much alder brush and small saplings, but appear to eat very little of this bark. They seem to prefer willow, but as

willow is scarce they subsist principally on hemlock. They cut only small trees, perhaps they do not like the coarse bark of the large trees. In other States I have seen many cottonwood and willow trees over a foot in diameter cut, but six inches was about the largest tree I saw cut here. In one ~~the~~ group of dams that we saw yesterday the beavers had cleared off about all the small trees and the place was so near deserted that all the fresh work we saw could have been made by one beaver. The bark seems to form their entire diet with the exception of water lily roots, and these cannot be eaten much or the plants would be less plentiful. It seems peculiar that these animals should subsist so exclusively on a food that was hard to obtain and always necessitated considerable exertion to bite off, when many species of plants were abundant, more easily got and eat, and apparently more nutritious.

June 14th. On my round looking at my traps this morning I found a female Canada Grouse with a brood of young. This is the only Grouse we have seen on Baranoff Island; nor have we heard a "Hoot." This female was very solicitous for her young and told. She came almost within reach of my hand a number of times, and it was difficult to drive her far enough away to "quit." her, As we had no firearms from her I wanted her, but it seemed best to kill her, Still it is no worse than to kill a sitting bird as we often do before we know that they are incubating.

July 9th. Glacier Bay. The adult male Microtus here have large gland-like spaces on their hips. These spaces on old males are nearly a square inch in area, but are much smaller in young adult males. They are areas of thicker and congested skin, the veins showing very distinctly on the inside, but are scarcely discernable on the outside. As they are lacking in the females I suppose they are sexual in office, in some way.

July 11. Glacier Bay, Two arctic terns shot today appear not to have bred, One contained ova about the size of No 8 shot; the larger ones of the other were about like No 10,

July 20. Glacier Bay, Littlejohn and I found a number of nests of Lunda cirrhata (Tufted Puffin) ~~has~~ the 16th, Several appeared to be finished, having some straws in the bottom of the burrow; others were not finished; one had one egg in it, and another had a young bird about three days old in it. The same day we saw a loon, probably the red-throated, at the edge in a fresh water pond on the island opposite the one the puffins nests were on, From her actions we thought she had a nest in the grass bordering the pond, and looked for it; while doing so we flushed a scaup duck (ring-necked?) from her nest, and later I found the two loon eggs laying on the ground with scarcely any nest material under them, They were two feet or so from the water and a ~~[illegible]~~ wide trail was beaten from the water to the nest and on back ~~[illegible]~~ of the grass, The incubation was so far advanced

that the chicks were pecking in the eggs.

The young duck falcons we have been raising are acquiring their full plumage. They have been pulling off the downy filaments of the nestling plumage which appears to be fast to the ends of the feathers of the later plumage. The larger bird has now cleared nearly all the down off. It has been exercising its wings by flapping them and will probably soon begin to fly.

When we arrived here at Coppermine Cove the 18th, Dixon and Hasselborg had several marmots laid out in a row. These varied greatly in color, and looked curiously like rough haired terriers in color and coarseness of pelage. Strawberries are just beginning to ripen. The mice are beginning to live on them Hasselborg says.

Aug 2. We moved camp to Hawk Inlet, Admiralty Island yesterday, and set up the tents close to a vacant log house, built by some miners. Mrs. S. and went into the house and as we came in something ran along the crack between two logs. Piece of

boards had been nailed over some of the cracks, including this one, but some were missing. Presently a weasel stuck its head out from behind the end of one of these boards and looked at us, occasionally disappearing and then reappearing. I went to the door and called Mr. Dixon in. By that time the weasel had run to the other end of the house and stopped by the side of the door. It manifested considerable curiosity, going so far as to jump down on the floor and run half way to us; but its courage vanished and it ran back and did not appear again. I set a steel trap by placing two boxes on the floor ~~end~~ close together, leaving room for the weasel to pass in, placing the trap at the entrance and putting the head of a bird between the boxes. This morning I had the weasel. It is a male and I think but a few months old. Perhaps its youth accounts for its extra display of curiosity.

Shrews seem to be plentiful here, the most so of any island locality we

have visited, Dixon has caught them in our trap within 24 hours, as I was putting out my traps about 11 o'clock a skunk ran along to where I was baiting a trap and sniffed the air in my direction, as if it could not see distinctly, I went back in about two hours and had an adult female in the trap, probably the one I had seen then, I think their eyesight is very poor, and that they depend on scent and hearing in hunting.

Aug 20th, Rodman Bay, Baranoff Isl
We are stopping in a cabin that is one of the buildings of the mining camp here, Two families occupy buildings further north, In front of our cabin, six feet from the door is a rail, held up by two posts We have put crumbs, bits of meat, etc on this rail and in a cup hung from it, A family of Steller Jays have become familiar enough to eat these crumbs regularly, They prefer crackers broken in small bits to anything else, I think the adults have not come so close to the door, but the young birds are quite fearless, They prey no

attention to us sitting within the open door, I set up my camera five feet from the nail and while focusing on the place when the bait lay a Jay came and fed, and a few minutes later one came which I stood beside the camera and snapped him, The day was cloudy and probably the plate was underexposed, A pair of Sharp-shinned Hawks are around, and chase the Jays some, but I think have caught none yet, They chase them in a half-hearted way as if the Jay was able to meet them, The Jays are not afraid of the Hawks, I have not been able to get a shot at the Hawks yet,

~~They~~ Sept. 3, Mr. Strassell killed a porcupine yesterday. He shot it through the lower jaw with rifle, breaking the lower part of the skull badly. This animal weighed 18½ lbs, - mammal 3/3, measurements are 715-213-90-25, The front pair of mammae contained milk, The nipples showed signs of use, but apparently not very recent. The stomach contained a mass of finely masticated food, mostly grass, probably

leaves and twigs, and digestion had scarcely begun. Mr. Stassell shot her about 2 P. M. – locality, thick forest.

Sept 28. About 3 P. M. today Mrs. Stephens and I were out in the forest two miles west of Renton, Washington. A highway had been cut through the timber several years ago, but had been allowed to grow up with brush, ~~a~~ I saw a hare (Lepus audubonii ss?) sitting on a log eating a fern frond and motioned to Mrs. S. to come and look at it. We could see the hare plainly as it was not more than thirty feet away, and it saw us as well. Presently it jumped down toward us and went on eating. We stood there looking at it two or three minutes, talking in a low tone about it. It then jumped back on the log and sat there looking at us quietly. I started toward it slowly and went several steps before it jumped down and went away. It was probably the tamest wild hare I ever saw, and

acted as unconcerned as any domestic mouse. It was very dark brown, below as well as above, The upper surface of the tail appeared to be black but I could not see the under side. The ears were brownish black. It appeared to be rather smaller than a California "cottontail". I had no gun with me,

Sept 29. Caught this mouse in a steel trap. See # 282

Oct 28th 1907. Anthony, Baker Co, Oregon, Eutamias are abundant around camp, They are less common on the plateau between here and Sparta (11 miles south). On the 26th I went to the top of one of the ridges north to alt. 6,000 feet, and saw none after getting half way up the ridge. Many, probably the majority, of those around camp are immature individuals. They are nervous fellows, very active, starting from a state of repose as if thrown by a spring and stopping as suddenly. When sitting quietly the tail is frequently jerked up or dropped down. On eating they sit

upright, on the hind feet, supported by the base of the tail, and use the fore feet like hands in holding food, Several shot had the internal cheek pouches stuffed full of small seeds, They do not seem to care much for fresh meat, I lost a number of small mouse traps through the Chipmunks having spring them in passing, probably accidentally, and the trap having caught a foot or tail the animal dragged it away, I found one Chipmunk lying dead near a "tin" trap which was three or four feet from where I had placed it, On skinning the animal I found the skull cracked; evidently the spring had struck it there, I found several Chipmunks dead in #1 steel traps, set for mink, etc, From the position the animals had evidently jumped on the pan in passing, or in investigating the bait,

Mr. Anthony told me that the Golden-headed Chipmunks (Eutamias

chrysodeirus S.S.?) had gone into hibernation three or four weeks previous to my arrival. He says they come out early in the spring. Chickarees (Sciurus douglassi S.S.?) are common here, though not as abundant as the Eutamias. They are not frequent higher, though apparently going higher than the Eutamias. While fairly active they are not nearly so nervous fellows as the Chipmunks. Their range of food is broader, and they are easily taken in meat baited traps. They are fond of mushrooms, a coarse species of which is common throughout the forest. They are unsuspicious, allowing one to pass within a few feet, close enough for effective use of an "ax". As one comes near they frequently run up the nearest tree and sit on a limb watching. They do not seem as inquisitive as the California Chickaree, and so far none have scolded me as those do sometimes. The notes heard were a chirring series, somewhat grasshopper-like. They feed more on spruce

seeds than on anything else apparently, little piles of scales on logs and stumps are frequent, but I have seen no large piles of scales on the ground like those made in Alaska by S. hudsonius.

Hal Anthony caught several Flying Squirrels here, principally in meat-baited box traps. I trapped for them particularly, but got none; apparently he got all living in the neighborhood.

The Microtus here puzzle me. Some appear to be Evotomys, but I cannot determine the matter in the field. They are not very common, and are principally nocturnal. Some I caught in thin grass along the creek near camp and others in brush on the bench above the mine. I saw one run under a stick in the forenoon, and on rolling the stick over found two, which I caught with my hands. Both were immature.

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